

College of Letters & Science



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The Aquarium Alumna



Cynthia Vernon champions education and conservation as COO of Monterey Bay Aquarium

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The sights and sounds of Spring 2022 Commencement



After a tumultuous university experience navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, the Class of 2022 received their diplomas at UWM's May Commencement ceremony.

The College of Letters & Science congratulates all of our new graduates for their tenacity, dedication, and determination. We hope you cultivate those qualities beyond campus to make your own indelible mark on the world. We wish everyone the best of luck and we cannot wait to see your future accomplishments!

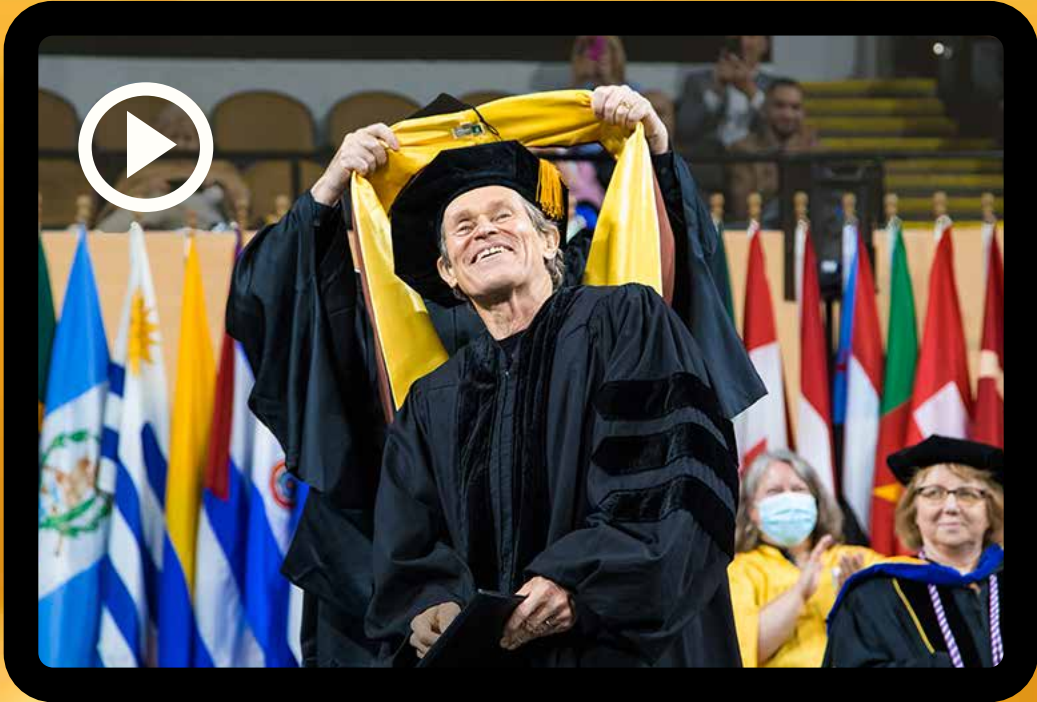


Above: Nigel Rothfels, professor and chair of the Department of History, gives graduate Connor Lynch a congratulatory hug. (UWM Photo/Elora Hennessey)

Below: Get ready to skip to the good part! Congratulations, Class of 2022, and thanks for showing us how to graduate. This is the video “They Understood the Assignment: UWM Graduation TikTok Edition 2022.”

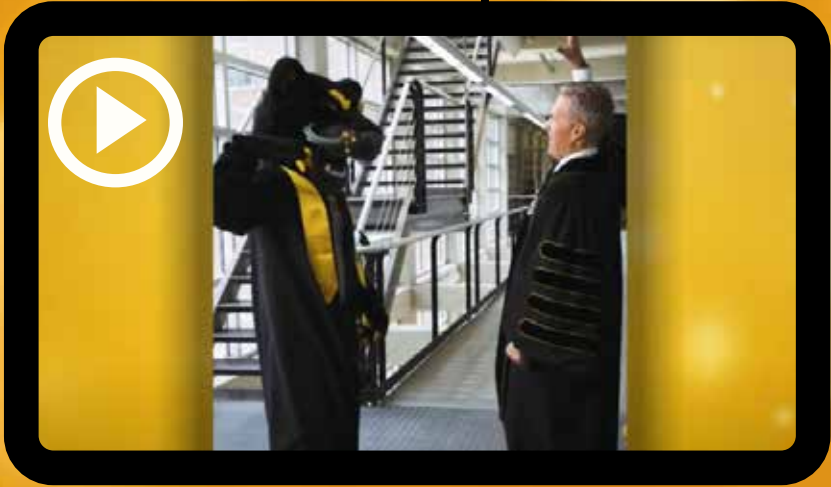
Above: Fifteen members of the UW-Milwaukee Class of 2022, including mathematics major Carmen Henry, share their favorite memories, standout moments and advice for future Panthers. Congratulations, UWM Class of 2022! We're Panther proud of you!

Below: Mentors Shevaun Watson (associate professor of English, at left) and Margaret Noodin (professor of English and associate dean of humanities, at right) embrace new doctor of English Rachel Skenandore. (UWM Photo/Elora Hennessey)



Four-time Academy Award nominee Willem Dafoe gives the commencement address to graduates of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee on May 22, 2022. Before his speech, Dafoe was awarded an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from the university, where he studied theater in the 1970s.

“Be at peace with yourself, find what you love and practice it anyway you can,” Dafoe tells the graduates. “Serve others, make every step a pleasure and trust it will take you where you need to be.”



A city divided: Grad student map Milwaukee’s “opportunity index”

Milwaukee is a city of opportunity – if you live in the right neighborhood. The proof is mapped out in [blue and white](#).

The map to the right was made as part of the [Mapping Opportunity for the Milwaukee Metro Area](#) project. Created by UWM Center for Economic Development graduate fellows Tathagato Chakraborty and Yotala Oszkay as a collaborative project, the interactive guide is a visual representation of opportunity available to residents in each U.S. Census tract listed in Milwaukee and its surrounding suburbs. The map expands to the four-county Milwaukee Metropolitan region including Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha and Milwaukee counties.

To Chakraborty, working toward his PhD in urban studies at UWM, and Oszkay, a PhD student in sociology at UCLA, opportunity is complex and multidimensional. In this case, Chakraborty said, opportunity means that there are avenues for a person’s socioeconomic upward mobility – that they have ways to foster growth and wellbeing.

“So, where you are living really affects your ability to be upwardly mobile. The spatial dimension is a really important aspect of opportunity,” Oszkay said.

The map shows all 478 census tracts in the Milwaukee metro region. For each tract, Chakraborty and Oszkay poured over thousands of pieces of census and other data sources to pull out three main dimensions that, together, determine a neighborhood’s “opportunity index.” They are:

1. Economic Dimension

The main indicators determining a tract’s economic health included **median household income, level of employment, number of people with high-paying jobs, and income level.**

Measuring economic indicators to determine economic opportunity is an obvious move, but those indicators also hint at other avenues – or barriers – to success.

“Economic disadvantages create a number of rippling effects to neighborhoods, especially in accessing quality services and resources that may hinder a person’s wellbeing. So if you are not in a desirable neighborhood, you may face certain barriers,” Chakraborty noted.

2. Education Dimension

Here, the researchers looked at the **highest level of education** that people had obtained and what percentages of households had **internet access.**

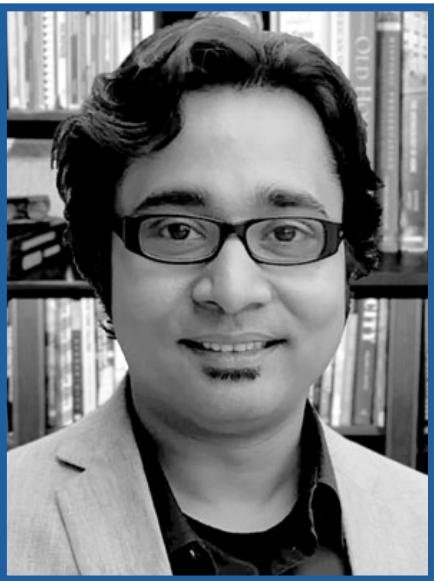
As one might expect, “Education is an essential tool for you to get to jobs, especially get a job that pays enough (to enable economic mobility),” Chakraborty said.

3. Housing Dimension

The main indicators here included **median home value**, what percentage of people in the area **owned homes**, and what percentage of households are **cost-burdened** (that pay more than 30% of their income into their mortgage or rent).

Housing is an important indicator, Chakraborty explained, because “housing is an asset which moves intergenerationally. If you have a well-valued housing situation, over time the equity increases. So, over a period of time, you actually accumulate wealth that may be passed on to the future generation or used to invest futuristically.”

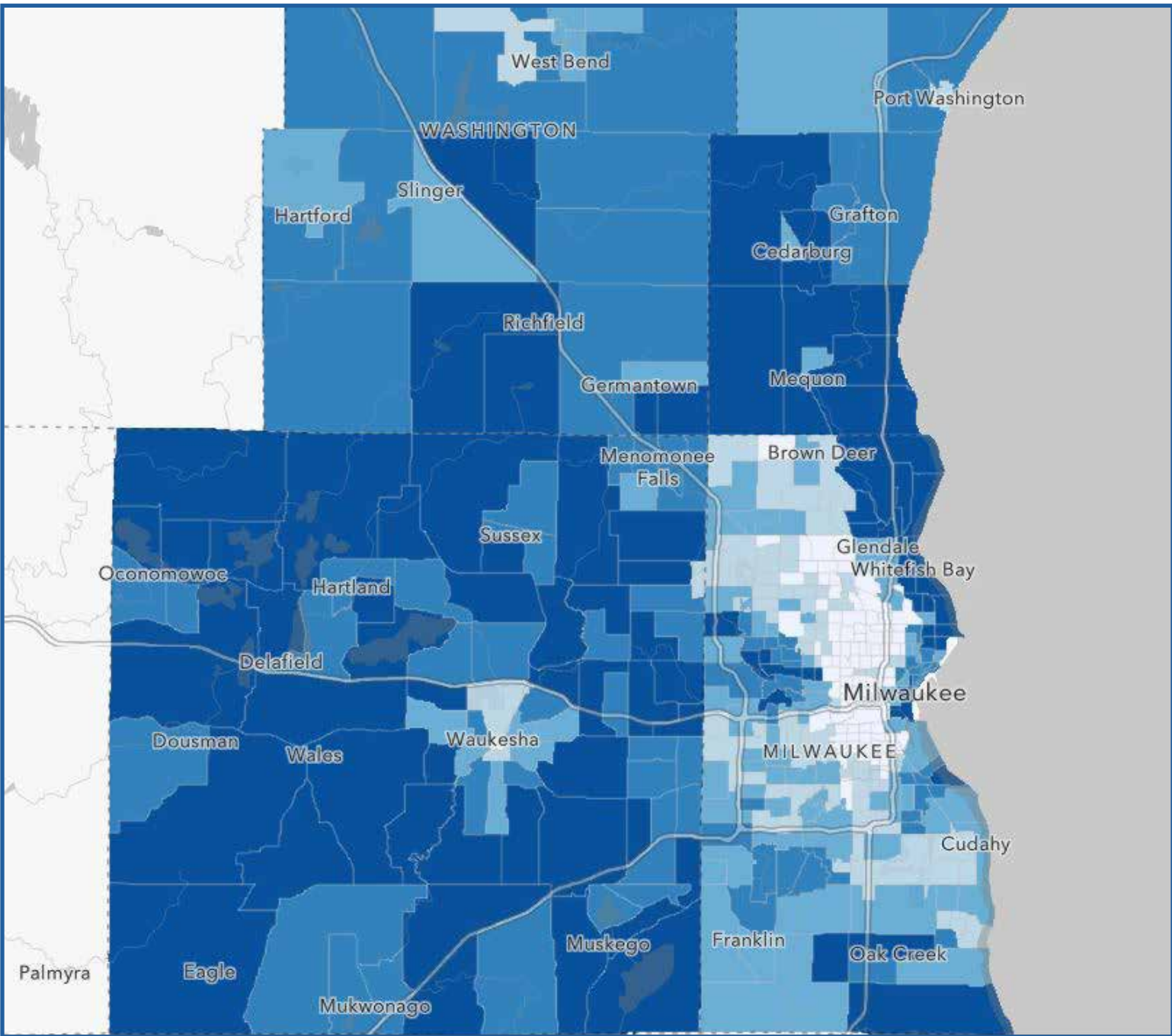
They classify five types of neighborhoods with varying level of opportunity. Areas with higher opportunity index values are marked in dark blue on the map; lower index values are marked in light blues and whites. Chakraborty and Oszkay ranked each tract for easy comparison between neighborhoods. They want the map to be easily read by everyone, not just academics.



Tathagato Chakraborty



Yotala Oszkay



This map shows the “opportunity index” for each individual census tract in the Milwaukee metro area. Darker blue indicates greater ease of socioeconomic mobility; lighter blue and white indicates less. The map was created by UWM Center for Economic Development fellows Tathagato Chakraborty and Yotala Oszkay.

The map also includes each area’s demographic information. However, the researchers stressed, that the index was designed to be race-neutral when they determined the dimensions of opportunity. The map strictly shows the opportunity index for each area, but does not speculate why a particular area might have a low index.

But Milwaukee is among the most racially segregated cities in the United States, and areas of high opportunity and low opportunity seem to fall along racial lines. Oszkay, who grew up in Milwaukee, was not surprised.

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Biology alum leads Monterey Bay Aquarium in education, conservation

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is a pioneering sort of place. Nestled right on the California coastline – the building has decks that stretch out over Monterey Bay itself – the aquarium was the first institution to build a living kelp forest within its walls and the first to display a Great White shark and have it thrive. The aquarium advocates for sustainable seafood through its “Seafood Watch” program, and is home to over 80,000 species of marine plants and animals.

As a pioneering sort of woman, UWM alumna Cynthia Vernon (*81, MS Biological Sciences) fits right in. She’s the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s chief operating officer, responsible for overseeing the institution’s exhibitions, facilities, animal care, guest experience, and education programs, among other duties.

Vernon is set to retire soon after decades of working in the zoo and aquarium business. She sat down to reflect on a satisfying career of helping people get in touch with the natural world.

I feel like every naturalist has stories coming home with frogs in their pockets as a child. Were you that kind of kid?

Yes, absolutely. My mom sometimes would tell a story about me in second grade. I came home from school, clutching a giant book that I had taken out of the library about animals of the world or something like that. I announced that I was going to be a naturalist when I grew up. So, I’ve always been focused on animals and the natural world.

Where did you do your undergraduate work, and what brought you to UWM for graduate school?

I consider myself a Cheesehead. I grew up in Brown Deer, Wisconsin. My undergrad degree is from DePauw University and I have a BA in zoology. After graduation, I was working with students at Oconomowoc High School on self-guided projects. The school district wanted me to grow the program and I needed to a teaching credential, which I didn’t have. UWM was the closest option, and a really good school. I enrolled in the School

of Education and spent a semester in the formal education world. I just felt like it wasn’t for me. I transferred to biological sciences and decided I was going to pursue my real interest, which was animal behavior and the natural world.

When did you start getting involved in the world of zoos and aquariums?

I got a preceptorship, basically an internship, at the Milwaukee County Zoo (while) I was still doing my studies. My last rotation was in the education department where I worked with the staff to develop a program for kids, and it was like I had found my true calling.

After graduating, you worked at the Fort Wayne (Indiana) Children’s Zoo before you landed at Brookfield Zoo, just down the highway from Milwaukee. What was your time like at Illinois’ biggest zoo?

I was there for 13 years. I started as an Education Specialist, developing and delivering education programs. I also got experience creating exhibits. They just kept giving me more things to do. I was promoted Curator of Education and then Director of Communications.

The Swamp was one of the first exhibitions that I worked on. I also worked on **The Living Coast** and **Habitat Africa**. Probably the one that resonates the most, though, was the **Hamill Family Play Zoo**, which was groundbreaking for its time. Its foundation was around how kids develop connections to the natural world through nature play. By providing them with experiences and play partners, they are able to learn about the natural world. That was a really important project for me.

How did you come to the Monterey Bay Aquarium?

My wife and I wanted to be on the west coast. I was encouraged to apply to an opening at the Monterey Bay Aquarium for Vice President of Education and Conservation. I was very fortunate to be selected.

For those of us who have never been there, can you talk about the Monterey Bay Aquarium?

It’s a fantastic place right on Monterey Bay. We sometimes joke with visitors that our best exhibit is the bay. You can go out on our back decks, and just yesterday as a matter of fact, we were out watching humpback whales. You can see their tails flukes go up and see their spouts right from the aquarium.



Biological sciences alumna Cynthia Vernon is the chief operating officer at Monterey Bay Aquarium. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Vernon.

I think the other thing that we’re known for is that we are first and foremost a conservation organization. Our mission is to inspire conservation of the ocean. We do that by getting people excited about the wonders in the bay and the ocean, and then telling them how they can do more to protect it. We get them jazzed up about very cool animals – otters and **Mola Mola** and octopi –

everything that makes up Monterey Bay and the ocean. Through our programming and our interpreters, we inspire people to take some next steps about what they can do, including choosing sustainable seafood and producing less plastic pollution, which is a huge issue for the ocean.

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The Monterey Bay Aquarium juts out into Monterey Bay. This photo and the cover image of Monterey Bay Aquarium’s kelp forest exhibit were taken by Wikimedia user Rhinopias.

Alum at the aquarium

[Continued from Page 7](#)

Part of your job involves ‘conservation psychology,’ or finding ways to make people care about the environment. With zoos, it seems easy to get people engaged with cool or cute and fuzzy animals. With aquariums, it strikes me as a bit harder; fish aren’t cuddly.

It’s about showing them the ‘wonder.’ We just opened a new exhibition called “Into the Deep,” and it’s the first time that anybody, any place, has shown some of the species of jellyfish and other deep sea animals that we have on display. These are all animals from the deep ocean and they’re just beautiful. I think one of the things that we’re known for is taking some of those things and using exhibition techniques, lighting, and music to help evoke some emotions.

You can tell people the facts that you know, but that’s not going to be as powerful as an emotional response. We’ve been able to display things in just spectacular ways that get people to say, “Wow, that’s so beautiful; it really needs to be saved. I’m going to do something about it.”

We do have some cute and cuddly things to see. Otters are pretty cute. We’ve got a lot of different sharks. We were the first aquarium to ever be able to display white sharks for more than a week. And we had six juvenile white sharks over a period of time. No other aquarium has ever been able to do that. And that was an incredible draw for visitors to come and see white sharks up close, and to learn about them and how important they are. We were able to change their feelings about those predators.

Do you have a favorite exhibit at the aquarium?

I guess it would be the Kelp Forest. I would say it’s our signature exhibit. There is a massive kelp forest, of course, right out in the bay. The founders of the aquarium were able to recreate that so that people could see right into the kelp forest, which supports an amazing diversity of life. (But) kelp forests need direct sunlight, and they need movement in the water. So, we were able to figure out how to create a wave machine and the exhibit is open to the sun and air. I love to go and stand in front of the exhibit when the surge machine is on because it has a very calming effect. We’ve got schools of sardines in there, and we’ve got all these amazing rock fish and little leopard sharks, all kinds of things. It’s just beautiful with the sunlight coming down through it.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is also known for its “Seafood Watch” list. What is that and how did it start? Do I need to stop eating tilapia fish tacos?

You’re good! Tilapia is good. It’s usually responsibly farmed.

There are so many different types of seafood out there and that’s one reason why we created the [Seafood Watch](#) program. It started from an exhibition that talked about the hidden costs of our seafood in terms of bycatch, and habitat destruction. As we talked about it, guests were like, “Should I not be eating seafood? What should I eat?” So, we got the idea to create a little consumer card that would help people. It started out with a color-coded, green-yellow-red system – green meaning, it’s good to eat this kind of seafood. It’s caught or farmed responsibly. Yellow is okay every once in a while, but give it a break. Red means you really shouldn’t be eating this kind of seafood.

That program really took off. People took their card to their supermarkets or restaurants. We have a whole science staff that provides the input into those ratings. We work with seafood



Cynthia Vernon greets Congressman Jimmy Panetta outside of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Vernon.

industries to help them improve and we work with folks in Thailand and in Mexico and other parts of the world to improve their seafood fishing practices or their aquaculture practices. So, it’s a very big and, I think, successful program that helps individuals as well as corporations make the right choices.

You started out as the Vice President for Education and Conservation, and rose until you were the Chief Operating Officer at Monterey Bay Aquarium. In a profession that can be male-dominated, how do you make space for yourself as a leader?

I’ve been fortunate to have come to Monterey. We have a very strong, female-led leadership group. That’s been a very affirming place to grow and develop. In terms of my leadership style, I do a lot of listening and coaching. I enjoy seeing people grow and helping them attain what they want to do. I rely a lot on my emotional intelligence to read the situation and help people find what they want to do – their true spark. I try to be a cheerleader for my staff and absolutely be a champion for women scientists. I have more opportunities to be able to elevate other women into those (science and leadership) roles.

You’ve had a great career and you’re retiring in January. Looking back and looking ahead, what are you most proud of? Is there anything that you still want to accomplish?

I’ve had some amazing experiences. I was very involved in the creation of the aquarium’s [Bechtel Family Center for Ocean Education and Leadership](#). It expanded our ability to deliver education programs to all kinds of communities. That was a huge accomplishment that I feel proud of.

And, gosh, the number of exhibitions that I’ve been involved with developing here in Monterey, and also at Brookfield Zoo – I feel very proud to have been a part of that. (I’m proud of) my professional association with the AZA, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. I’m currently on the board of directors. I have been very involved in promoting the principles of conservation psychology, environmental behavior change, and in creating a culture of conservation within organizations. I want to create space for the next generation of leaders coming up, so I feel like this is a good time to sail off into the sunset.

By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science

From Batman to Hera, student research shines at Beastly Conference

What do Batman, the Greek monster Argos, and a fictional flesh-eating virus have in common?

They were all the subjects of some frightfully well-researched presentations at UWM's Beastly Conference in May.

The Beastly Conference is becoming an annual tradition in UWM's Honors College. Now in its third year, the small symposium invites humanities student researchers to pick their own topics centering on a beastly theme and present their work for their peers and teachers.

'Beastly' is open to interpretation.

"We were drawn to questioning what really makes a human a human," said Jessica Plotkin, the student responsible for organizing this year's conference. "What's the dividing line between humans and animals?"

Plotkin, who graduated in May, was a pre-med student who majored in Classics ("I have always loved ancient Greek culture. I'm never going to have a chance to do this as a doctor, so as an undergraduate I decided to go all in on ancient Greek stuff," she explained.) She was also a co-founder and leader of [HARPY](#), a student research group that hosts both the Beastly Conference and its complementary Monster Conference in the fall.

HARPY stands for the Honors Association for Research and Publication. The group added the Y as a nod to the Greek mythological harpies, half-bird and half-women creatures who steal food and torment the wicked. The group is meant to facilitate student research in the Honors College.

While UWM's Office of Undergraduate Research does a great job of connecting students with faculty research projects, "There is still a gap for people who want to do humanities-based research because there aren't labs like there are for the hard sciences," Plotkin said. "We wanted to create a student-directed, humanities-based research organization. So, we did."



Classics major Jessica Plotkin delivers a presentation about the myth of Hera and Io at the Beastly Conference in May. Plotkin organized the conference to showcase student research. Photo by Sarah Vickery.

Under the guidance of faculty advisor Jacqueline Stuhmiller, HARPY founded the Monster and Beastly conferences three years ago. Organizing this event is a months-long undertaking, and one shouldered almost solely by Plotkin herself, since her fellow HARPY officer was studying abroad this semester. Plotkin put out a call for papers in January and talked with her classmates to encourage them to submit abstracts. When she had a spate of potential presenters, she worked with several to help them develop their research ideas from vague outlines into actual presentations.

"It was a phenomenal experience to see them go from confusing abstracts where they're just throwing out ideas and seeing what sticks, to being these really coherent, strong presenters who have gained confidence in their abilities," Plotkin said with pride.

For example, there was Cameron Ahles, a mechanical engineering major who started the conference with a thoughtful look into the superhero Batman. Ahles used the DC Comic character to highlight how humans routinely borrow animal qualities to better understand our own humanity. For example, we use a 'Birds and Bees' talk to teach children about sex and reproduction.

"Alas, we are ashamed of, and petrified by, our primal, animalistic nature. Bruce (Wayne, Batman's secret identity) is too, but when he dons the mask, he finds more of himself than ever before," Ahles observed.

"The Batman shows the power of our access through our beastly instincts. Batman is the hero we need to guide us through the darkness: The darkness around us and the darkness in ourselves."

Then there was Danny Muntz, a first-year student who introduced his audience to the SPC Foundation. It's an online creative writing forum focusing on fictional anomalies, like a flesh-eating disease that slowly erases its victims' human features and personalities. Muntz posited that a person's individuality – their hopes, fears, likes, dislikes, tastes, and more – is what makes them who they are. But, he added, through disease, death, or even dementia, "We can lose what makes us human. We can become beasts."

For her presentation, Plotkin, of course, turned to mythology, explaining misconceptions surrounding a popular myth: Zeus, fearful of his wife Hera's wrath, turns his lover Io into a cow. The suspicious Hera sets her many-eyed monster, Argos, to guard the cow, and Zeus kills the monster to free his lover. Hera, mourning the death of Argos, sets his many eyes on the tail feathers of a peacock.

But, Plotkin said, there's more to this myth. The popular version that most people are familiar with today was penned by Ovid and portrays Hera as a scheming, jealous woman. However, in ancient Greece, Hera was revered and respected. Earlier versions of the myth claim that Io was the high priestess of Hera's temple when Zeus assaulted the unlucky woman and later changed her into a bovine. Argos was not a monster but instead a mortal, gifted extra eyes by Hera, who was sent to protect Io. And finally, Hera's favorite animal was never the peacock, Plotkin argued – her favorite animals were always humans.

The conference was held in person and also streamed live over Zoom. Plotkin was delighted with its success.

"These students are phenomenal," she said. "They put in such incredible work every semester, and this semester's crop was especially impressive. So, I recommend that you keep an eye out for HARPY in the future."



Mapping opportunity

[Continued from Page 5](#)

"It confirmed what I qualitatively understood. That gave me confidence, actually, for what we were doing – seeing how the data really shows what I experienced as a resident," she said. "You can see how I-43 divided two areas, where there's affluence (on one side) and lack of opportunity (on the other)."

Chakraborty went a step further.

"As an experiment, I did overlay the redlining map and the famous segregation map on our index (this image was not published as part of the project). The geographic symmetry of those areas that are redlined, that are segregated, and that are showing in our index as nice or very low opportunity areas coincide perfectly!" he said. "It confirms the historical trajectory of why we are here and how we are here."

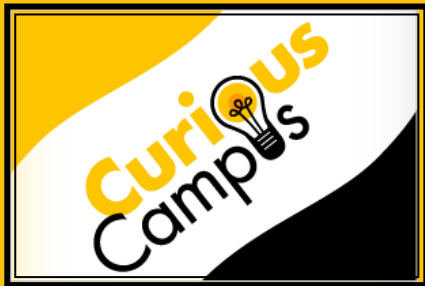
The extremely detailed work builds off some of the research performed by UWM associate professor of sociology Marcus Britton, who studies how location impacts [social and economic outcomes](#), and by associate professor of geography Anne Bonds and English assistant professor Derek Handley, who are currently mapping the modern impacts of historical [racial housing restrictions](#) in Milwaukee.

Chakraborty and Oszkay hope that their map will help viewers understand the full scope of opportunity and inequality in Milwaukee in racial-spatial terms, although it does not include any race-specific indicator. And if they understand it, the researchers said, perhaps leaders can work to change it.

"Policy makers could very easily take a glance at this map and see where investment needs to go and which areas need reparations," Chakraborty noted. Oszkay added, "Where you live is going to shape who you are and what you become. I think that's an important perspective for a broader audience to consider when understanding their lived experiences."

The Mapping Opportunity for the Milwaukee Metro Area project is finished, and both Chakraborty and Oszkay are taking a pause on research to finish up their PhD work – Chakraborty here at UWM, and Oszkay in sociology at UCLA. They both thanked the researchers at the UWM Center for Economic Development – Joel Rast, Yaidi Cancel Martinez, and Lisa Williams – as well as UWM's American Geographical Society librarian Stephen Appel, for their support and help in completing the work.

By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science



Catch up with the Curious Campus podcast

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www.uwm.com/show/curiouscampus

For songbirds, bigger, brighter might be better

Welcome back to Wisconsin to the common yellowthroat. [Found throughout much of North America](#) in breeding season, the male common yellowthroat features a distinctive “witchety-witchety-witchety” sound that even the most novice of birders might recognize.

But females might be attracted to looks. Peter Dunn, a UWM distinguished professor of biological sciences, is part of research team that authored a recent study looking at the courtship preferences of the common yellowthroats. They found that large or showy physical features of males attract females because they signal high-quality male genes, such as those linked with robust immunity or stress resistance.

On this episode of Curious Campus, we chat with Dunn about his work, the UWM Field Station and tips for aspiring birders. The hobby took flight during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as a safe outdoor activity.

Dunn gives some background about the common yellowthroat, the importance of the study and some advice for those inspired to go see and hear these songbirds themselves. Listen to the full show at WUWM.com or on your favorite podcast app.

For more details about the study, read this [UWM Report story](#) published in February.

Describe the common yellowthroat.

Yellowthroats are about the size of chickadees. They are one of the most common warblers, and they have a big yellow throat and breast (which is also known as a bib). That’s one of their ornaments. And they also have a black mask in the male that covers the face — we sometimes call them the “Zorro bird” because of that black mask. The females are relatively nondescript — they don’t have as much yellow and it’s not as bright.

They’re very common throughout North America. They’re mostly down in Mexico in the winter. And they breed in the United States and southern Canada. They like marshy areas and they have a song that’s pretty familiar to bird-watchers.



Peter Dunn

How does your study help us better understand these songbirds?

It helps us understand why birds are so attractive-looking. It also helps us understand how evolution works in terms of understanding why some creatures have crazy-looking ornaments and traits.

Is the backyard the best place to start birding?

Sure! You can see a lot of cool things in your backyard. I’ve had some really weird things in my backyard. A couple years ago, I had a Townsend’s solitaire, a bird that’s only found in Colorado and further west, and it liked the juniper berries on the tree in my backyard. I just put out a notice on the local bird-watching network over email that I had this bird in my backyard, and I had dozens of people coming to see this bird. You can see some really cool things sometimes.

But yes, bird feeders are good. The other thing to get started is to look at the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology webpage. They have a whole bunch of field trips, so I would suggest people go on some field trips and meet people who are more experienced, and can help identify things. There’s also the Audubon societies around town and the Urban Ecology Center — they all have field trips, so that would be a good way to get started.

Field trips are fun because you meet other people, and birding is a social thing, to a large extent. You get to share the excitement of seeing a new bird for the first time. ... And get one of those apps from Cornell or Audubon, and a pair of binoculars. That would really help.

By Genaro C. Armas, University Relations

For frogs, the mating competition is fierce

In the wild, frog romance is a raucous affair. When it’s time to mate, the female Eastern gray tree frog makes her way to the pond, when there could be hundreds of potential suitors, each calling to her in loud chirps that have different audible characteristics.

In this nighttime chorus, the male aims to charm the female with his particular call. But what makes a call “attractive”?

On this episode of Curious Campus, we talk with two researchers who specialize in amphibian communication — how frogs message each other and then decide how to respond.

Gerlinde Höebel is an associate professor in biological sciences in UWM’s College of Letters & Science. Michael Reichert is an assistant professor of integrative biology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Oklahoma State University.

Below, they answer some questions about mating calls. Listen to the full show at WUWM.com or on your favorite podcast app.

Set up the tree frog mating game for us. As the female approaches the pond, what are the conditions?

Reichert: There could be hundreds of males out there calling on a good night. It’s very dense and very loud. So, it’s quite a challenge for the female to distinguish between them and try to find the male whose call she prefers.

And we know that females tend to have preferences for certain types of call characteristics. And so, what we are trying to determine is why they have these preferences and also how they manage to then find these mates within the very chaotic chorus.

Why is the competition so fierce?

Reichert: The pond is going to have far more males on a given night than females. If males are able to attract a female, then they’re going to be able to pass along their genes to the next generation. Most females are only going to mate once a summer, but the males could be out there pretty much every night.

Höebel: Female frogs generally only come to the pond when they’re ready to mate — that’s when they already have a clutch formed, which can consist of hundreds or thousands of eggs. So that requires a lot of energy. It’s really, really hard to do. So many females may only have the energy to produce one clutch a year, and maybe only once in a lifetime because so many of them just don’t live very long. Most of them we collect are only a year old. That’s because many get eaten. Frogs are a very important component of the food chain.

Is there something about this work that has surprised you?

Höebel: We started by trying to find the characteristics that, on average, most females like best. Now we’re interested in individual female preferences. And we’re really surprised how variable those are. Even for things like call duration. Turns out, there’s a sizable minority of females that don’t think long calls are so hot. We’ve found that almost half the female population we’ve tested think that really fast calls are ugly. But others really love it. So the fact that some females have preferences that are complete opposites blew me away.

So female call preferences fall into a wide range. What’s the significance of that?

Höebel: The diversity in female preferences does relieve the pressure on males and keeps the variation of male calls alive because then everybody has some chance of success.

How is sexual selection related to evolution of a species?

Reichert: Sexual selection and natural selection are very powerful. Natural selection includes things that influence survival, like camouflage, but sexual selection is for attracting mates. Most of the things we find interesting about animals — their bright colors, impressive tails or the sounds they make — these are features related to mate attraction. And they have evolved because they allowed individuals to be more successful at attracting mates.

By Laura Otto, University Relations



In the Media and Around the Community

Yaidi Cancel Martinez (Center for Economic Development) noted on [WUWM Radio](#) that a low rental supply is a factor in driving high rent prices in Milwaukee.

Jeffrey Sommers (Global Studies and African and African Diaspora Studies) delivered a Fulbright Commission sponsored lecture (“The Economics of Russia’s War in Ukraine”) in Bucharest on May 30 at the National University for Political Studies and Public Administration.



Italian photographer Letizia Battaglia, famous for chronicling decades of Mafia violence and murders in Italy, passed away in April 2022. **Robin Pickering-lazzi (Italian)** memorialized Battaglia’s life in an article originally published on [The Conversation](#) and reprinted internationally.

Maria Novotny (English) spoke with [Fox 6 News](#) about her work RESOLVE, the national infertility association, during National Infertility Week.

Some churches in Milwaukee may soon begin transcribing old housing covenants and deeds as part of the “Mapping Racism and Resistance in Milwaukee County” project, **Anne Bonds (Geography)** said in an article published by [FaithandLeadership.com](#). Bonds also explained to [Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service](#) how historical racially restrictive housing policies have impacted high rent prices today.

Bettina Arnold (Anthropology) presented an invited lecture entitled, “[European Celtic Identity: Made in Greece?](#)” at the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies in Athens, Greece on Thursday, April 28.

Martha Carlin (History) was quoted in a [Mashed.com](#) article detailing the history and behind-the-scenes happenings of the dinner theater restaurant Medieval Times.

In 1947, an earthquake shook Wisconsin. **Brett Ketter (Geosciences)** explained how unlikely the event was in a [Milwaukee Magazine](#) article.

David Kaplan (Physics) co-authored an article for [The Conversation](#) detailing the science and new discoveries associated with scientists’ hunt for pulsars in space.

Sara Benesh (Political Science) analyzed what a ruling to overturn Roe v. Wade might mean for abortion laws in Wisconsin on [WUWM Radio](#).

If a proposed merger between AdvocateAurora Health and Atrium Health goes through **Scott Adams (Economics)** explained on [WUWM Radio](#) that healthcare could be made more efficient, but not necessarily less expensive.

The popularity of canned cocktails is on the rise in Wisconsin and elsewhere. The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) highlighted alumna **Dawn Egbert (‘03, Masters of Public Administration)** who runs Dashfire, a Minnesota business selling canned bitters, cocktails, and coffee.



Black holes are not vacuum cleaners; they do not “suck up” every passing object in space, **Jean Creighton (Planetarium)** told [Mashable.com](#) in an article dispelling some myths about black holes. Creighton also took to [WUWM Radio’s Lake Effect](#) program to shed light on May 15’s blood moon total lunar eclipse.

What’s the story behind the duck statue at the Wisconsin Avenue Bridge? **Amanda Seligman (History)** told [WUWM Radio](#) how the city of Milwaukee rallied around Gertie the Duck and her ducklings as symbols of solace during World War II.

In the [Door County Pulse](#), **Robert Jeske (emeritus Anthropology)** wrote about the discovery of beaver and human blood on ancient stone tools recovered at The Cove archaeological site in Door County. Jeske says this is proof people at The Cove engaged in interpersonal violence.

[Health Imaging](#) reported on how **Mark Dietz (Chemistry and Biochemistry)** has prepared students to assist in the production of molybdenum-99 (Mo-99) and other critical medical isotopes used in radiological imaging.



Alumni Accomplishments

Felice Green (‘89, BA Journalism and Mass Communication) was named to the Sherman Park Community Association Board of Directors for a two-year term by members of the association. She was named to the Milwaukee Riverkeeper Marketing and Fund Development Board Committee in 2021. BizTimes Media named her a 2021 Notable Marketing Executive. Green is a graduate of the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County Project Lead leadership program and is a guest writer for the national “The Pink and The Black Project,” a public policy awareness project aimed at increasing breast cancer awareness, research, and decreasing health disparities in African Americans. Since 2016, she has been a member of the Capuchin Community Services (House of Peace & St. Ben’s Meal Program) Community Ministry Council and in 2020, she received a Black Excellence Award for community service and volunteerism. Felice has worked in professional roles including marketing, communications, community outreach and public relations for Girl Scouts of Milwaukee Area, Interfaith Older Adult Programs, and Vivent Health.



Felice Green

Richard Lemke (‘01, BA Psychology) joined [Lakeland College](#) as a new faculty member in the school’s Criminal Justice Department. Lemke previously taught at the University of West Georgia and has completed several research projects, including the Ohio Risk Assessment System which is now in the public domain.

John Diedrich (‘92, BA Journalism) was among four journalists selected to become fellows in Marquette University’s [O’Brien Fellowship in Public Service Journalism](#). Diedrich is a reporter with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*’s investigative team. He and his cohorts will collaborate with student reporters for nine months to investigate complex national and local issues.

Christine Steeno (‘94, Masters of Human Resources and Labor Relations) joined [World Insurance Associates LLC](#) as its national operations and client service leader for its employee benefits practice. Steeno brings 20 years of experience to the role and was previously the senior vice president and director of operations and client services at Willis Towers Watson Midwest, Inc.

Susan Kerns (‘13, PhD English) was among four winners of Columbia’s 2022 [Excellence in Teaching Award](#). Kerns, an associate professor of cinema and television arts at Columbia, says she enjoys teaching film theory and showing students how film relates to society.

Steven Potter (‘04, BA Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies) joined [PBS Wisconsin](#) as a reporter. He previously worked at Wisconsin Public Radio and has written for a number of news outlets, including the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and The Onion’s *A.V. Club*.

Kaitlin Sharkey (‘13, BA Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies) joined [WGN Sports](#) as a full-time anchor. She will co-host the live half-hour “GN Sports” show and cover Chicago sports teams. Sharkey been in sports journalism since graduating UWM and most recently worked as a sports anchor/reporter at WFLD-TV Chicago.



People in Print

Miren F. Boehm (Philosophy). 2022. Review of Hsueh M. Qu. Hume’s Epistemological Evolution. Oxford University Press. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 60 (1):165-167.

Anne Pycha (Linguistics), Michelle Cohn, and Georgia Zellou. 2022. Face-Masked Speech Intelligibility: The Influence of Speaking Style, Visual Information, and Background Noise. [Frontiers in Communication](#). Online.

Jagadeesh Kumar Uppala, Leena Sathe, Abhijit Chakraborty, Sankhajit Bhattacharjee, Anthony Thomas Pulvino, and Madhusudan Dey (all Biological Sciences). 2022. The Cap-proximal Secondary Structure Inhibits Translational Inhibition by Precluding Helicase eIF4A Recruitment on HAC1 mRNA. [Journal of Biological Chemistry](#), 298(3).



Laurels and Accolades

Jeffrey Sommers (Global Studies and African and African Diaspora Studies)

was granted a U.S. State Department Fulbright Specialist award for Romania in May through mid-June. He will guest lecture and work on research projects with faculty in the Political Science Department at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest.

Sommers is also providing economic policy counsel for a prime minister candidate for Latvia's upcoming parliament elections this autumn. Additionally, he is following up with the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation for their second proposed economic development report on Latvia centering on tax policy. He is also meeting with representatives of the Open Society Foundation regarding assembling and economic development report for Ukraine. Finally, Sommers was named [Visiting Professor](#) in the Department of Political Science at Babes Bolyai University, listed as Romania's No. 1 ranked university by US News and several other ranking agencies.



Jeffrey Sommers

Winson Chu (History) was elected to the executive board of the [Central European History Society](#), an affiliated organization of the American Historical Association. He will serve on the board until 2026 (serving successively as Vice President Elect, Vice President, President, and Past President).

Shangping Xu's (Geosciences) project, "The Use of Pore-Scale Contaminant Transport Simulation Framework to Facilitate the Development of Next Generation Water Filters," was selected for funding under the 2022-23 Ignite Grant Program for Applied Research. A total of \$50,000 was allocated for use in this project.

Nicholas Fleisher (Linguistics) served as co-chair of an AAUP (American Association of University Professors) Special Committee on Governance, Academic Freedom, and Institutional Racism in the University of North Carolina System. The release of the [committee's report](#) was covered in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The New York Times*, and many other outlets.

Graduate student **Clayborn Benson (History)** was featured on [TMJ4 News](#) and lauded for his efforts in pursuing higher education - at age 70. Benson, who is working toward his Master's, is a former photojournalist and is the founder of Milwaukee's Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum.

Michael J. Mikos (Foreign Languages and Literature)

journeyed to Poland in May to attend the V Congress of Translators of Polish Literature, where he was invited to be a member on a panel. While in Poland, he lectured in the Summer School of Polish Language and Culture at the John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, his 39th program in Poland. He also read a paper, "The Motif of Water in Adam Mickiewicz's Poetry," at the II International Congress of Polish Literature in Cracow, Poland. Finally, he also received a Silver Medal Gloria Artis from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in Cracow.



Michael Mikos

Upcoming Events at the Planetarium

June 14, 9:30-11 p.m.: Strawberry Moon

Gaze at the full strawberry supermoon through our telescopes while enjoying Purple Door ice cream! Telescopes and binoculars will be set up near Engelmann field for visitors to view the Moon. We will also offer free planetarium shows every 15-20 minutes. No registration required. Check in at the UWM Planetarium.

June 24, 7-8 p.m.: Constellations of the Zodiac

We will explore the stories and science of the zodiac constellations with a focus on this month's constellation – Cancer. The program includes an indoor stargazing session. Not recommended for children under 4. For questions about this event, please email planetarium@uwm.edu. Tickets are \$5-6 per person.